A Correlational Study on Enjoyment and Anxiety in a Foreign Language Learning Context

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Abstract

Emotions are of vital importance in the foreign language learning process. However, while anxiety is one of the most commonly studied affective variables in the foreign language research context, positive emotions have recently become a trendy research topic among English as a foreign language (EFL) researchers. In addition, foreign language anxiety (FLA) and foreign language enjoyment (FLE) are related emotions that might coexist in individuals, while the number of studies in the Turkish EFL context is too limited to draw a conclusion. This study aims to investigate whether there is a relationship between enjoyment and anxiety in the Turkish EFL learning context. In this correlational study, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES) were administered to 242 English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. The correlational data were obtained to see the relationship between FLA and FLE. The results showed that there is a significant negative correlation between FLE and FLA.

Keywords: English as a foreign language; foreign language enjoyment; foreign language anxiety

Introduction

Emotions are of paramount importance in explaining foreign language learning (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) "as humans exist in language and in emotions" (Aragão, 2011, p. 302). With the

prevailing influence of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and the humanistic movements in the 70s and 80s (Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014), anxiety became one of the most commonly studied affective variables in the second and foreign language research context (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017) with a predominant focus on the negative side (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). However, positive emotions have recently become a trendy research topic after the growing interest in positive psychology (De Smet et al., 2018). Consequently, anxiety and enjoyment have become the leading emotions in the mentioned contexts (Rezazadeh & Zarrinabadi, 2020).

There are several reasons to explore FLA and FLE more extensively targeting their potential relations. First, emotions have long been neglected in the foreign language research context (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) since foreign language learning is conceptualized mainly as a cognitive phenomenon (Boudreau et al., 2018). Second, it is critical to explain the "poorly studied and so poorly understood" affection (Prior, 2019, p. 516) since cognitive and emotional processes are unevenly but directly related to emotions (Swain, 2013). Third, the current research mainly deals with the problematic aspects impeding foreign language learning and displays an overemphasis on negative emotions like anxiety (Boudreau et al., 2018), while the positive facet has been underlooked in the field (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Fourth, FLA and FLE are not the opposing poles of a dichotomy since one does not mean the absence of the other (Boudreau et al., 2018). They are separate but related emotions that might coexist in individuals (Elani Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2020). Last, positive psychology and humanistic approaches adopt a holistic perspective suggesting that each individual is unique in their cognition and affection (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). Below, a brief research synthesis on the relationship between FLA and FLE is presented after drawing a theoretical framework regarding the mentioned issues.

Theoretical Framework

Several terms and concepts need to be clarified within the scope of FLA and FLE. First, *Foreign language anxiety* is defined as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284) and has three elements: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). *Communication apprehension* is experienced among EFL learners when foreign language learners need communication in a realistic context (Aida, 1994). *Fear of negative evaluation* refers to the fear of negative judgements in any evaluative setting which is not limited to the testing situations (Horwitz et al., 1986). *Test anxiety* is experienced by learners who are afraid of failing a test, mostly in academic contexts (Aydin et al., 2020). Second, *foreign language enjoyment* is defined as "a complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of the challenge and perceived ability that reflect the human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks" in foreign language learning activities (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016, p. 216).

A theoretical framework should also be drawn regarding FLA and FLE. According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, the learner has an affective filter that determines the amount of input to be processed by their mind (Krashen, 1982). Second, the Broaden-and-Build Theory proposes that positive emotions broaden individuals' momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources in a range from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2004). In addition, the Self-esteem Model suggests that positive emotions are essential for second language acquisition since learning

and acquisition of a language require maintaining the self-verification process in groups and individually (Dörnyei, 2005). Last, according to the Control-Value Theory, FLE is dependent on the values regarding positive and negative emotions (Piniel & Albert, 2018).

Literature review

As Shen (2021) states, there has been a growing interest in searching FLA and FLE, focusing on their relationship. First, several studies have indicated a negative correlation between FLE and FLA (Dewaele, Magdalena, et al., 2019; Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2021; Liu & Wang, 2021). Second, studies conclude that FLE and FLA coexist among foreign language learners and that FLE is usually higher than FLA. For instance, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) found that EFL learners had significantly higher levels of FLE than those of FLA. In another study, Elahi Shirvan and Taherian (2021) observed an increase in FLE and a decrease in FLA in the EFL learning context. Thus, it can be pointed out that FLE is more influential in the foreign language learning process. For example, in their correlational study, Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) concluded that FLE is more influential on foreign language performance than FLA. Similarly, Dewaele et al. (2018) suggested that EFL teachers should promote students' FLE rather than trying to lower their FLA. Third, individual and interpersonal characteristics are seriously influential on FLE and FLA. For example, according to a study conducted with 210 participants (Dewaele, Chen, et al., 2019), friendliness seemed to explain a significant variance for FLE. In addition, it is more often teachers' pedagogical skills than students' FLA that determines the amount of FLE experienced by learners. Fourth, FLE and FLA differ significantly based on learners' attitudes and perceptions. Dewaele and Dewaele (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017) found that learners experienced FLE more and FLA less when they had more positive attitudes towards foreign language learning, the teacher, and the amount of time spent on speaking. Likewise, Dewaele and Li (2022) found that self-perceived general proficiency predicts FLE and FLA more than actual proficiency. Interestingly enough, they noted that self-perceived proficiency in grammar and reading predicted both emotions, while it was not valid for perceived proficiency in listening, reading, or vocabulary, indicating domain-specificity for FLE and FLA. In the same vein, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) found that foreign language learners experienced different levels of FLE and FLA regarding their perceived and actual proficiency levels, educational background, age, other foreign or second languages they know, and the number of the languages they were currently learning.

While FLA has long been studied from several aspects in Turkey, FLE has just started to attract interest among researchers. Moreover, only two recent studies focused on examining FLE and FLA together in the Turkish EFL context. First, in their correlational study, Dewaele and Proietti Ergün (2020) collected data from 110 Turkish pupils learning Italian and English as a foreign language in an Italian immersion school in Istanbul. They found a negative correlation between FLA and FLE. They also concluded that the participants with high FLA had lower marks in both languages, whereas FLE was not a significant predictor of course marks. The second study that used a mixed-method research design included 233 secondary school students in Turkey (Özer & Altay, 2021). The results indicated that the participants had a higher level of enjoyment and a moderate level of anxiety.

Overview of the present study

As emphasized above, emotions are of vital importance in the foreign language learning process. However, while anxiety is one of the most commonly studied affective variables in

the foreign language research context, positive emotions have recently become a trendy research topic among EFL researchers. In this perspective, the related research mainly deals with the problematic aspects impeding foreign language learning and displays an overemphasis on negative emotions like anxiety, while the positive facet has been underlooked in the field. In addition, since FLA and FLE are related emotions that might coexist in individuals, there has been a growing interest in the research of FLA and FLE, focusing on their relationship. Nevertheless, the number of studies in the Turkish EFL context is too limited to draw a conclusion. Thus, this study aims to investigate whether there is a relationship between enjoyment and anxiety in the Turkish EFL learning context. With these concerns in mind, the study seeks an answer to the following research question:

- Is there a relationship between enjoyment and anxiety in the Turkish EFL learning context?

Method

Research context

The study followed an analytic approach and deductive objective and used a correlational research design. The first reason for following this preference was that it was necessary to gain further insight into the correlations between FLE and FLA among EFL learners. Second, since the correlations between FLE and FLA were the focus of the study, questionnaires and scales would be appropriate to obtain data on the mentioned variables. Second, collecting data from the participants' perspectives without intervention in a natural context was essential. Thus, a correlational research design was an appropriate one to fulfill the purposes of the study (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989).

Participants

The sample group in the study consisted of 242 students enrolled at the Departments of English Language Teaching of state universities in Turkey. The mean score for their age was 20.5 within the range of 19 and 22. They were 162 female (66.9%) and 80 male students (33.1%). The gender distribution was a general reflection of the general population of the mentioned departments. The group consisted of 30 first-year (12.4%), 93 second-year (38.4%), 89 third-year (36.8%), and 30 fourth-year students (12.4%). All of the participants were at the level of C1 by the standard of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Tools

Three data collection instruments were used in the study. First, a background questionnaire was used to collect data on the participants' age, gender, and grade. Second, the FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was used to measure the levels of foreign language anxiety among participants. The scale consisted of 33 items and included three constructs: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree). The internal consistency based on Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was measured as .93, while % of variance was not reported in the study by

Horwitz et al. (1986). Third and last, the FLES developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) was used to obtain the level of foreign language enjoyment among the participants. The scale consisted of 21 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree). The internal consistency based on Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the scale was measured as .86.

Procedure

After the approval from the ethics committee, an online version of the research instruments was shared via Google Forms. A text was added to the form to inform the participants about the purpose of the study, voluntariness, confidentiality, and anonymity of their responses. Then, the participants were invited to participate in the study via posts shared on Edmodo, Google Classroom, and social media environments such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. The form was kept online for one month.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze the data collected. The numbers and frequencies for gender and grade were calculated. Then, the mean score for age was computed. The reliability coefficients and percentages of variances were also computed for the FLCAS and FLES. As seen in Table 1, the reliability coefficients were .84 for the FLCAS and .88 and the FLES. Regarding the validity of the scales, the values for % of variance were 61.9 for the FLCAS and 61.8 for the FLES. The values regarding the reliability coefficients and % of variance indicated an acceptable level of reliability and validity of the scales used in the study. Next, the descriptive data including frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were prepared. Finally, Pearson correlation was used to explore whether foreign language enjoyment was correlated with foreign language anxiety.

Results

The values in Table 1 show that FLE is negatively correlated with FLA among EFL learners (p=.04). There was a negative correlation between FLE and fear of negative evaluation (p=.00), while a positive correlation between FLE and test anxiety was observed (p=.03). On the other hand, the values indicated no correlation between FLE and communication apprehension among EFL learners.

Table 1. Correlations between foreign language enjoyment and anxiety

Variables		Foreign language enjoyment
Foreign language anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.13*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.04**
Communication apprehension	Pearson Correlation	-,01
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.90
Fear of negative evaluation	Pearson Correlation	-.25**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
Test anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.14*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.03**

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). *
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). **

The values presented in Appendix A indicate that the correlations between FLE and the items in the FLCAS were in three dimensions. First, it was observed that FLE was positively correlated with feeling no worry about making mistakes (p=.00) and being called on in foreign language classes (p=.00), being at ease during tests (p=.00), feeling no upset in foreign language classes (p=.00), feeling calm while speaking to native speakers (p=.02), feeling confident in speaking classes (p=.00), and feeling no pressure for preparing tests (p=.00). Moreover, FLE was positively correlated with feeling self-conscious about speaking the target language in front of other students (p=.01), feeling sure and relaxed in language classes (p=.00), and feeling comfortable around native speakers (p=.01). Second, FLE is negatively correlated with feeling not sure while speaking (p=.01), trembling when called on in language class (p=.00), thinking about things during the class (p=.00), feeling panic when speaking without preparation (p=.00), and feeling nervous when forgetting things (p=.00). FLE was also negatively correlated with feeling embarrassed while answering questions (p=.00), feeling anxious when not well-prepared for class (p=.01), feeling like not going to class (p=.00), being afraid of the teachers' error corrections (p=.04), fear of being called in class (p=.00), making comparison to other students regarding speaking (p=.02), and worrying about getting left behind (p=.00). The values also indicated that FLE was negatively correlated with feeling tense and nervous in class (p=.00), feeling nervous in speaking classes (p=.00), being nervous when the teacher was not clearly understood (p=.04), feeling overwhelmed by the number of rules in the target language (p=.02), being afraid that other students would laugh during speaking (p=.01), and the teacher's threatening questions (p=.00). Third, it was found that there was no correlation between FLE and feeling frightened when the teacher was speaking (p=.06), worrying about exam results (p=.19), feeling upset when teacher corrections were not understood (p=.70), feeling confused while studying for tests (p=.07).

Conclusions and Discussion

According to the findings of this research which aimed to explore the correlations between FLE and FLA, three main conclusions were reached. First, FLE effectively reduces anxiety caused by making mistakes, speaking to native speakers, pressure for getting prepared for tests, and speaking in front of other students. Second, FLE reduces anxiety during speaking in the target language, being called on in language class, speaking without preparation, answering questions, and error corrections. FLE is efficient for decreasing FLA which are stemmed from making comparisons to other students, teachers' questions, and the difficulty in learning content. Third, FLE does not seem related to FLE within the scope of exam results, studying for tests, and teachers' ambiguous corrections.

The results obtained from the study contribute to the extant literature in the context of the relationship between FLA and FLE among Turkish EFL learners since only two studies focus on the issue. First, the current research differs from the studies performed by Özer and Altay (2021) who focus on the levels of FLA and FLE, while the current study examines the relationship between the two variables. Second, the results seem similar to those reached by Dewaele and Proietti Ergün (2020) who found a negative correlation between FLA and FLE. From this perspective, it should be also noted that the findings are also similar to the ones

obtained from the studies performed by Dewaele et al. (2019), Elahi Shirvan and Taherian (2021), and Liu and Wang (2021) who observed a negative correlation between FLE and FLA.

In light of the findings, some practical recommendations can be noted. In the broadest sense, EFL teachers should use certain strategies and tactics to increase the level of FLE in their classes since FLE effectively reduces FLA. For achieving this, they should raise their awareness of the role of positive emotions. Then, they should present content and design tasks and activities to increase students' engagement in their classes. Teachers should also show friendliness and create good relations with students. Next, they should focus on learners' achievements rather than failure regarding feedback sessions and examinations.

Several limitations of the study can be noted. First, the scope of the study was confined to correlational data obtained from a background questionnaire, the FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), and FLES designed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). Second, the participants were restricted to 222 EFL learners studying at the Department of English Language Teaching. Third, the data included EFL learners' perceptions of FLA and FLE. Thus, it should be noted that the data collected were limited to participants' self-reports and perceptions rather than their actual FLA and FLE. Further research focusing on EFL learners' actual FLA and FLE is warranted, as studies mainly focus on learners' perceptions. For this purpose, qualitative and experimental studies should be carried out for an in-depth and better understanding of the correlation between FLA and FLE among EFL learners.

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Appendix A. Correlations between foreign language enjoyment and anxiety

Items		Foreign language enjoyment
I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	Pearson Correlation	-.18**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.01**
I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	Pearson Correlation	.35**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	Pearson Correlation	-.24**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	Pearson Correlation	-.12
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.06
It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	Pearson Correlation	.36**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	Pearson Correlation	-.23**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	Pearson Correlation	-.11
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.09
I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	Pearson Correlation	.28**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	Pearson Correlation	-.20**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	Pearson Correlation	-.09
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.19
I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	Pearson Correlation	.20**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	Pearson Correlation	-.20**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	Pearson Correlation	-.21**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
I wouldn't be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	Pearson Correlation	.15*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.02**
I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	Pearson Correlation	-.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.70
Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	Pearson Correlation	-.17**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.01**
I often feel like not going to my classes.	Pearson Correlation	-.32**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	Pearson Correlation	.36**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**
I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	Pearson Correlation	-.13*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.04**
I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	Pearson Correlation	-.29**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.00**